

**COUNCIL
27 OCTOBER 2004**

**SOUTH EAST CHARTER FOR ELECTED MEMBER DEVELOPMENT
(Director of Corporate Services & Resources)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The South East Employers organisation in partnership with the IDeA has developed a new Charter on Elected Member Development. This report invites the Council to become signatories to the Charter and to appoint a Member working group to steer the Council towards full Charter status by 31 March 2006.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That the Council confirms its commitment to good practice in Elected Member development by becoming a signatory to the South East Charter for Elected Member Development.**
- 2.2 **That a Member Development Working Group be established comprising 6 Members (5 Con: 1 Lab) with the following terms of reference:**
- (a) To conduct a self-assessment exercise against the charter criteria;**
 - (b) To develop an action plan for achieving Charter status by 31 March 2006;**
 - (c) To oversee implementation of the action plan and to monitor and advise on the Council's ongoing arrangements for Member Development.**

3. ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Section 151 Officer

- 3.1 The financial implications of the report, including the £1,000 fee for the support and assistance of South East Employers, can be met from within the current Members Services budget.

Borough Solicitor

- 3.2 Nothing to add to the report.

Access Implications

- 3.3 None.

4. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 The South East Charter has been developed in partnership with the IDeA and is based on the well established and successful North West regional Member Development Charter which all councils in that region have made a commitment to.
- 4.2 The pace of change in local government has placed an increasing emphasis on an authority's need to rethink their approach to member support and development. The majority of local authorities across the South East have some form of member development programme in place. However, the approach, levels of commitment, effectiveness and progress vary considerably. Authorities signing up to the South East Charter have the following objectives:
- (a) Being fully committed to developing Elected Members in order to achieve the Council's aims and objectives.
 - (b) Adopting a member-led strategic approach to Elected Member development
 - (c) Having a member learning and development plan in place that clearly identifies the difference development activities will make
 - (d) Seeing that learning and development is effective in capacity building
 - (e) Addressing wider development matters to promote work-life balance and citizenship.

Bracknell Forest Borough Council will be among the first authorities to sign up to the Charter, demonstrating its commitment to supporting members and developing best practice.

The Accreditation Process

- 4.3 There are five stages involved in working towards Charter status.

Stage 1 – Signing up to the charter and an action plan

Authorities wishing to participate are required to sign up to the charter and to specify a target date by which they aim to achieve charter status. The authority will then undertake a self-assessment against the Charter criteria and develop an action plan for submission to South East Employers.

Stage 2 – Improving the development of Elected Members

The authority will work towards achieving charter status and meeting the requirements of its action plan. An initial assessment against the requirements suggests that a target date of 31 March 2006 is achievable in Bracknell Forest.

Stage 3 – Assessment

When the authority considers it has everything in place to demonstrate it has fulfilled the requirements of the Charter an on-site assessment will be conducted by a small team of peer elected members with officers from South East Employers. A report will be sent to the Council following the assessment visit outlining good practice, areas for improvement and whether it has achieved charter status.

Stage 4 – Awarding the Charter

When an authority has been assessed and achieved the Charter, it will receive its certificate/award at an annual celebration event.

Stage 5 – Re-assessment

Once awarded, the Charter has a life span of three years after which a local authority will be required to submit details of how it has sustained the standard. This will be judged by a trained team of Elected Members and officers undertaking a desk top review.

Support from South East Employers

- 4.4 Ongoing support will be provided by South East Employers to all authorities making a commitment to work towards charter status. This will cost a total of £1,000, which can be met from the Members Services budget. The support will include advice, workshops, support materials, a detailed assessment report and the regional celebration event.

Why do it?

- 4.5 It could be argued that Bracknell Forest already has comparatively good arrangements in place for member development and training, having been a 2004 finalist in the MJ Member Development Awards. However this regional initiative will help to strengthen and improve our arrangements with additional advice and a robust external assessment. It will enable Bracknell Forest to participate in the raising of standards in local government regionally, sharing some of our good practice and also learning from others. Some members will also have opportunities to be trained as “peer assessors” and to contribute directly to raising standards in other authorities.
- 4.6 At a time when the pace of change in local government seems unrelenting it is important that Elected Members are given the best possible support within the resources at their disposal. The £1,000 cost of this initiative can be funded from existing budgets and represents a sound investment in raising the standard of our member development arrangements. The Council is recommended to become a signatory to the charter and to appoint a Member working group to oversee the initial self-assessment and action plan and to guide the Authority towards achieving Charter status.

Background Papers

The South East Charter for Elected Member Development – report from South East Employers

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Document reference

09 South East Charter for Member Development